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Facts on Fees

by REID GEYER

There's a rule that those in marketing and public relations fields know all too well: no matter how much time you spend advertising, no matter how clear your presentations are, and no matter how much positive feedback you get, someone out there will still not "get it."

The same seems to be true with the way the College of Business and Behavioral Science has been handling the "CBBS Fee." They've put together a Web page to explain what the \$1,000 per semester is for and duplicated it on posters around campus.

But the truth is that if you ask a student who has visited the Web page if they understand what they're paying for or ask many professors within the college if they think the fee has helped, both parties will tell you "no." I myself was in that same camp until I began to ask around and figure out what it's all about.

So here are the facts:

First there is the history and total of the fee. The CBBS Fee was first put in place during the 2005-2006 school year by a former dean. The fee started then at \$500 per semester and generated \$2.4 million for the college. New administration in the college soon brought with it a hike in the fee that was capped at \$1,000 per semester. This generated revenue of \$3.19 million in 2006-2007 and \$4.12 million in 2007-2008. Altogether, this fee has added \$9.7 million to the college since 2005.

Next comes the question of to where the money goes. Many faculty members have alleged that this large sum was being dumped into Clemson's general budget and not invested back directly in those who paid it. The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at Clemson, charged with managing all things statistical here at the University, confirms that all of the money stayed within the college. However, figuring out where it went from there becomes more difficult. The money is mixed in with general revenue, so nothing can be tagged exclusively as "paid for by CBBS Fee." But we can note where expenses have gone up.

The college has promised that the majority of the money would go towards classroom instruction, including paying for more professors. According to OIR, that's true. "The evidence presented here supports the contention that CBBS has provided much more support for its instructional programs than the CBBS fees alone could have supported." While the CBBS now pays nearly \$9 million more a year for instruction, \$4 million of which goes to salaries, the fee generates less than half of that total at most. So when they say they're paying more for the classroom, that's happening.

So what are we getting back for it in the classroom? The college has hired an additional 27 faculty members since 2005, 20 of which are full-time professors. The rest of the \$9 million goes to pay for employee benefits and professional development which the Dean's office claims is about 15 to 20 percent of the revenue. This would still seem to be an extraordinarily high salary figure for the number hired, but I was assured that with the going rate for new business and finance professors, it was not. Endowed chairs also take up some of the expense.

The biggest benefit of the fee is the guarantee that no student in CBBS will have to postpone graduation because of class unavailability. The classes you need may not be at a convenient time or with the professor you want, but you will get them. The class sizes at the 400 level have also shrunk, creating what should be a fairly noticeable difference for students.

Not everything has improved since the addition of the fee. Our Business Week ranking did go down, as students rated our facilities lower and others lowered our academic quality ranking.

Many other regional schools such as UGA also dropped, but it should not be an excuse. The Dean's office is hoping to be able to put aside money for renovations soon that would have the added benefit of improving our rank, but when that will be is to be determined later.

So the final conclusion should be as such: the CBBS Fee is working, though at a slower rate than most would hope or expect. Our \$1,000 a semester investment is producing a return, though like many other investments in the United States, it's much lower than it could be. We must change the status quo, and I look forward to hearing what the Dean's office proposes to make sure it happens.

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